

# **US and China Competition for Influence in Central Asia—A Comparative Analysis**

**A Monograph  
by  
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## **Abstract**

US and China Competition for Influence in Central Asia—A Comparative Analysis by MAJ CHARLIE L PELHAM, US ARMY, 62 pages.

Central Asia has become the forefront of US and Chinese foreign policy since its independence in 1991. The US foreign policy toward Central Asia focuses on security, economics and energy and has not changed since its development in the mid 1990's. China's foreign/regional policy toward Central Asia has developed over the past decade focusing on security of its western border to energy development and economic investment. Both countries strive for a strategic advantage in the region in order to obtain energy resources. The purpose of this monograph is to examine US and China policies toward Central Asia and provide a comparative analysis of these policies using the national instruments of power. This monograph will show that China has surpassed US influence in the region with the development and implementation of its "grand strategy" that encompasses bilateral and multilateral relations. In order to close this apparent strategic gap on China, the US should consider a review of its policy priorities and maximize existing relations within multilateral organization such as NATO and regional powers within Central Asia.

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## INTRODUCTION

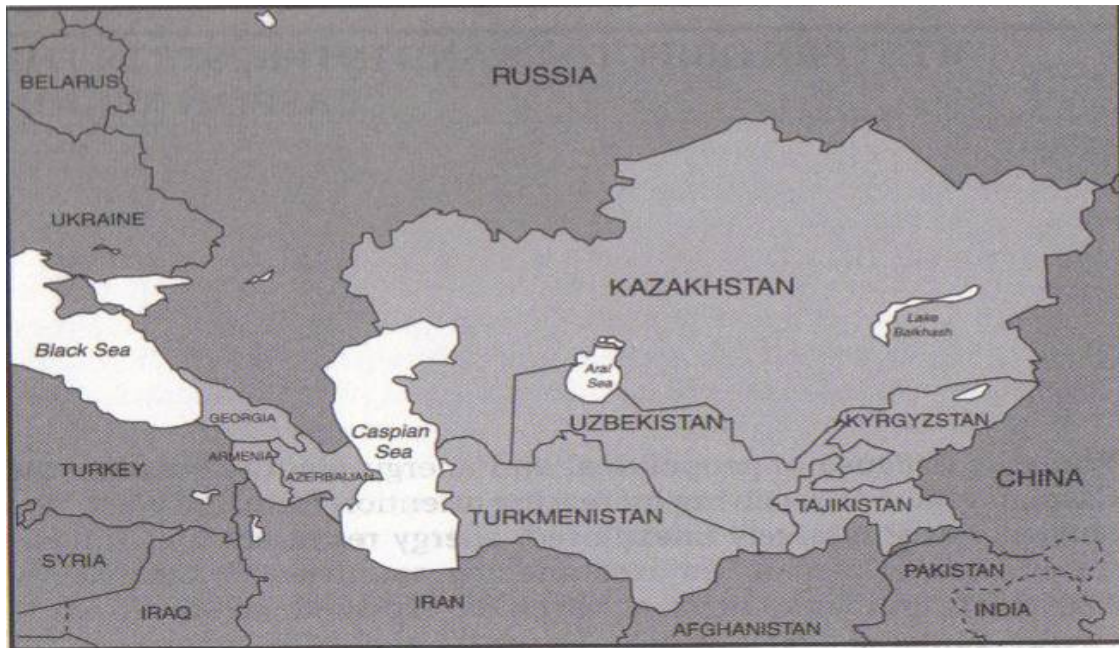
Central Asia states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—gained their independence from the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War. The fear of continuing Russian influence in the region led these states to seek security from the west. Under the auspices of NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP), the US found an opportunity to engage in military-to-military cooperation with Central Asian states and strategically set the stage for potential democratic reforms within the former Soviet controlled states. Utilizing foreign aid packages, the US set out to modernize Central Asia states through economic and political reforms. The abundant oil and natural gas resources in the region also provided a venue for potential investment by US companies. The military-to-military cooperation within these Central Asian states led to the US success in Afghanistan after September 11, when some of these states allowed limited basing rights to US military forces.

US military forces stationed within the region led to the implementation and establishment of the Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO) in 2001. Established around the Shanghai 5, the SCO consists of China, Russia, and four of the five Central Asian states as a cooperation of regional security to combat terrorism—which was similar to the objective of the GWOT. Once military operations stabilized in Afghanistan and the US strategic focus shifted to Iraq, the SCO—primarily China—became concerned about increased US influence and began to question US interest in the region mostly focusing on regime changes. Through China's economic, military and political ties to the Central Asia states within the SCO, they persuaded—along with Russia—Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to ask US military forces to leave their territorial borders. China has an energy dependent economy that is actively seeking to expand its capability by obtaining resources from other countries in the world including Central Asia states. As the US competes for energy resources and political influence, other SCO allies such as Russia have a shared interest in removing US influence from the region combined with SCO observer

countries—Iran, Pakistan and India—joining the organization has future implications in US policy toward Central Asia.

The purpose of this monograph is to provide a comparative analysis of US and China's foreign policy within Central Asia. It will begin with the historical context of Central Asian states in Chapter One, which will set the framework for US and China's introduction into the region. Chapters Two and Three will describe the introduction and policy development of US and China respectively. These chapters provide historical concepts and development of foreign policies that will be compared in Chapter Four. Chapter Four provides a comparative analysis between the US and China using the national instruments of power as a model—focusing on three of three of the four elements. This analysis will provide a clear understanding of who has a strategic advantage in each national power element. Chapter Five provide recommendation for the US to consider in its Central Asia policy.

## CHAPTER ONE: Central Asia



**Figure 1: Central Asia and the Caucasus<sup>1</sup>**

Central Asia, also known as “Eurasia” begins along the Caspian Sea and extends west toward the western Chinese borders. As depicted in Figure 1, Central Asia is a landlocked region encapsulated by Russia in the north, Iran and Afghanistan in the south and China in the east. In order to maintain control of this region and quell ideas of independence during their occupation, the Russians established borders of all the Central Asian states to separate ethnic populations. Also known as, “the Silk Road”, Central Asia became a primary land trade route linking Europe to Asia. Sunni Islam is the predominant religion in the region with a small minority of Christians, Jews, and Jehovah witnesses scattered throughout the region. Central Asia is very rich in natural resources and all five countries have some combination of hydrocarbons (oil, coal and natural gas) and agricultural resources (cotton) make this region a highly competitive market for trade

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Sokolsky and Tanya Charlick-Paley. *NATO and Caspian Security: A Mission Too Far*, (Washington D.C: Rand Cooperation, 1999), 6



and investment<sup>2</sup>. However, being landlocked has been an economic disadvantage for some of these countries to reach outside markets without infrastructure support from larger neighbors—such as China, Russia and Iran.

Since gaining independence from Russian in 1991, Central Asian states have gone through an evolutionary change while attempting to establish stable governments and growing economies. Political power is held among majority tribes or ethnic groups within the Central Asian states and force commonly used to maintain control. The most common struggles that Central Asian states face since independence include unemployment, high inflation, shortages of basic goods, organized crime, governmental corruption, terrorism, modernization of their industrial base as well as drug and weapons smuggling<sup>3</sup>. Most of these struggles stem from the lack of change in the political leadership since gaining their independence. These political leaders—primarily trained in politics under the communist system in Russian—have established and maintained a semi-authoritarian government in which the state controls everything from industry to the media. Ethnic tensions and denial of human rights have all been problems associated with these states, a situation overlooked by some nation states in order to exploit natural resource exports within the region. In order to provide some clarity of the dynamics in each of the Central Asian states, the remaining sections within this chapter will focus on some key characteristics in order to set the stage for future discussion within this monograph.

## **Turkmenistan**

Turkmenistan is regionally located in the southeaster corner of Central Asia along the Caspian Sea. The ethnic group distribution of the population within the country—based on 2003

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<sup>2</sup> Glen E Curtis. ed., “*Kazakstan, Krygyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan: Country Studies*”, (Washington. D.C: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1997), xxxii

<sup>3</sup> Curtis, Glen E., ed., xxxii

census data—is 85 percent Turkmen, 5 percent Uzbek and 4 percent Russian<sup>4</sup>. Saparnurad Niyazov, a former communist party member is the only president that the country has had since their independence. Niyazov's political philosophy for Turkmenistan is to remain neutral on almost all international issues and isolate the country from multinational as well as regional organizations<sup>5</sup>. With this isolationism, Turkmenistan is the only Central Asian state not part of the Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO) and is dependent on selected bilateral relations to maintain economic stability within the country.

Turkmenistan enjoys abundant hydrocarbons with estimated oil reserves of 500 million barrels and 2 trillion cubic meters of natural gas—ranked fifteenth in the world in 2005<sup>6</sup>. With this amount of hydrocarbons, Turkmenistan is considered an energy independent country that can sufficiently supply energy to their population—primarily in the form of natural gas—and export excess supplies to generate income in order to maintain some type of economic stability. In 2001, Turkmenistan exported 980 million kilowatt hours of electrical power to neighboring countries, a level which has gradually increased proportionally based upon their expecting annual natural gas production<sup>7</sup>. The capability of supplying energy is a primary concern for the Niyazov government foreign policy due to its isolation and inability to access foreign markets makes relations with Russia vital to its success—most of the oil and natural gas pipelines go through Russia and into the European markets. Currently bilateral negotiations with other countries in the region is allowing the Turkmenistan government to expand into other eastern markets—such as China, India and Pakistan—to counter Russian dependency in maintaining economic order.

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<sup>4</sup> Larry Clark, Michael Thurman, and David Tyson. “*Country Profile: Turkmenistan*”, (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, December 2005 accessed 12 January 2007), available from <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/tmtoc.html>. 2

<sup>5</sup> Larry Clark, Michael Thurman, and David Tyson., 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 3. The amount of natural gas ranked fifteenth in the world in 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 7. In 2001, the estimated outputs of hydrocarbon were 162,000 barrels per day in oil and 48.2 billion cubic meter of natural gas. These production output rates have increased gradually since 2001, which has allowed the country to trade excess energy to other countries.

Relations with other states within the region are restricted generally to natural gas and oil sales respectively. However, there are some long-standing tensions with Uzbekistan over the treatment of the minority Uzbek population within Turkmenistan<sup>8</sup>. Other internal problems associated with this country include drug trafficking—mostly from Afghanistan—and illegal arms. As with most countries in this region, human rights and political stability are hurdles that will continue to limit foreign investment within the country.

## **Uzbekistan**

Located north of Turkmenistan and south of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan is a country that has strived for international recognition since the independence in 1991. The ethnic distribution within Uzbekistan—from a 1998 census—is 76 percent Uzbek, 6 percent Russian, 4.8 percent Tajikistan, 4 percent Kazakh, 1.6 percent Tatar and 1 percent Krygyz<sup>9</sup>. President Islam Karimov—a former communist party leader—assumed control under the premise of political and economic reforms but has executed change under authoritative measures—continuing the chain of human and civil right abuses. Karimov’s primary objective in the region is to seek regional economic domination and remove any internal threats to his political power—such as mass media, opposition parties and terrorist<sup>10</sup>. The Andijon uprising in 2005 clearly shows Karimov’s domestic objective to suppress opposition groups in order to maintain his domestic policy. These actions caught the attention of the international community facilitating an eventual change in US policy toward Uzbekistan.

Natural resources within Uzbekistan include oil and natural gas, but the most significant economic resource within the country is gold. Although there are other minerals (silver, copper, lead), gold mining has had the most significant economic impact by making Uzbekistan the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 12

<sup>9</sup> Nancy Lubin. “Country Profile: Uzbekistan”, (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, December 2005, accessed 12 January 2007), available from <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/uztoc.html>, 6

<sup>10</sup> Nancy Lubin., 14

world's sixth largest gold reserve and ninth in overall gold production<sup>11</sup>. Foreign investment is highly encouraged by Uzbekistan as way to maintain its economic dominance strategy in the region. Companies such as the US Newmont Mining Company and Britain's Oxus Gold have established joint mining ventures with Uzbekistan<sup>12</sup>. Uzbekistan is self sufficient in supplying energy to their population and is an exporter of natural gas as well as oil to their regional neighbors. Cotton exports are second behind gold as economic stabilizers within the country.

Relations with regional neighbors are varied and primarily focus on national security threats to the Karimov government. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is a terrorist organization that has sworn to remove Karimov from power and establish an Islamic state. The IMU was defeated within Uzbekistan and Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom, which lead the IMU to move operations into neighboring Tajikistan. A series of bilateral and regional organizational security agreements against Islamic fundamentalism have been a major theme for the Uzbekistan government in order to maintain national security. Territorial disputes with Tajikistan and the treatment of Uzbek minorities in neighboring countries are just some of the relations dynamics that exist within Uzbekistan the span beyond the scope of this monograph.

## **Tajikistan**

Located east of Uzbekistan and sharing 414 km of border with western China, Tajikistan's newly found independence as a nation-state after 1991 has had a dramatic effect on the development of this country. Tajikistan's ethnic groups—based off 2000 census—consists of 79 percent Tajik, 15.3 Uzbek, 1.1 percents Russian, 1.1 percent Krygyz and other smaller ethnic groups (Turkmen, Jewish, Koreans and Ukrainians)<sup>13</sup>. President Rakhmon Nabiyev (elected in 1992 to present) has led Tajikistan through one of slowest economic and political reforms within

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 8, These ranking were taken from as of 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>13</sup> Muriel Atkin. "Country Profile: Tajikistan", (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, January 2007, accessed 12 February 2007), available from <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/tjtoc.html>, 5

the region. The United Tajik Organization (UTO) led a civil war against the Nabiyeve government from 1992 to 1997 when the two parties finally agreed to a cease-fire<sup>14</sup>. Unlike their regional neighbors, Tajikistan is the only Central Asian state that is semi-dependent on foreign support—primarily Russia—to maintain economic, political and military stability within its borders.

Tajikistan's natural resources are primarily in minerals and mining areas with significant amount of gold and silver. Due to its geographic location as well as political and security instability, foreign investment has become extremely limited. Tajikistan produces aluminum as a their main export which accounts for more that half of their total export value which includes other items such as cotton and hydroelectric power<sup>15</sup>. Tajikistan, unlike most of the Central Asian states has to import oil from its regional neighbors in order to subsidize their primary source of energy. Hydroelectricity is the primary source of energy that accounts for 5 percent of the energy demand while import on hydrocarbons (oil and natural gas) from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan account for the remaining 95 percent of total energy demand<sup>16</sup>.

Relations with foreign powers (Russia, US and China) through bilateral and regional organizations have become an essential part of the Nabiyeve government. Tajikistan has always maintained military relations with Russia and balance by allowing US basing rights for aircraft to support operations in Afghanistan. This balance is to ensure that Islamic fundamentalist organizations—such as the IMU or Al-Qaeda—do not migrate into Tajikistan's southern borders. However, relations with Uzbekistan have been strained over this key issue as IMU insurgents establish bases within Tajikistan causing Uzbekistan to emplace mines on it eastern border—a primary path for nomadic groups crossing the borders. Other relations problems—primarily with Uzbekistan—will continue to hamper stability of Tajikistan in the future.

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<sup>14</sup> Muriel Atkin., 2. The UTO is an organization is comprised of Islamic leader and opposition group leaders. Small groups within this organization continue to operate within the country against the current government.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 9

## Kyrgyzstan

Located north of Tajikistan, east of Uzbekistan, south of Kazakhstan and sharing 900 km of border with Western China, Kyrgyzstan has a dynamic history of change since its independence in 1991. Census data of ethnic groups in 1999 shows the population distribution as the following: 65 percent Kyrgyz, 14 percent Uzbek, 13 percent Russian, 1 percent Dugan (Chinese Muslim), 1 percent Tatar, 1 percent Uyghur and 1 percent Ukrainian<sup>17</sup>. Unlike its regional neighbors in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan has had more than one president after its independence beginning with Oskar Akayev in 1991. President Akayev as with the majority of his peers in Central Asia sought to make economic changes and create political stability within Kyrgyzstan. However, his attempt to make changes led to a series of events that changed the political atmosphere. Maintaining a political stronghold on the government became a priority in controlling all aspects of the government. As a series of elections in 2000 and 2005 occurred, Akayev used his political power to sway votes and suppress opponents in order to maintain the presidency. This tactic failed as international organizations began to question election procedures for both the presidential and parliamentary election led to the 2005 “Tulip Revolution” that eventually forced Akayev to flee the country<sup>18</sup>. Kurmanbek Bakiyev (an opposition leader) becomes the second president of Kyrgyzstan in mid 2005 and assumes the challenge of building a stable economy and security within his borders.

Natural resources of value within Kyrgyzstan are limited to gold with substantial amounts of unexplored fossil fuels—such as coal—in the country. Gold mining and production is a centerpiece for foreign investment—such as the Norox Mining Company of the UK—within Kyrgyzstan and accounts for more than 80 percent of the exports, which facilitated eventual

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<sup>17</sup> Martha B Olcott. “Country Profile: Kyrgyzstan”, (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, January 2007, accessed 10 February 2007), available from <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/kgtoc.html>, 5

<sup>18</sup> Martha B Olcott. “*Country Profile: Kyrgyzstan*”, 2

membership into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1998<sup>19</sup>. Agriculture (cotton, tobacco) also plays an important role in exports behind gold. With fossil fuel development at a relative standstill and an abundant source of hydroelectric power, Kyrgyzstan established energy trading—mostly natural gas—with Uzbekistan in order to maintain sufficient amounts of fossil fuels. Energy trading and exporting to other countries in the region—mostly China—is seen as a way to potentially diversify exports and create economic balance.

Kyrgyzstan views membership in regional organizations and bilateral relations critical to continued security and economic development<sup>20</sup>. Maintaining a balance relationship with Russia, China and the US is important to the Bakiyev government. Kyrgyzstan supported US forces by renting an airfield to support US operations in Afghanistan has strained relations with Russia and China respectively. China's concern of Kyrgyzstan Uyghur minority supporting their ethnic kin in terrorist attack in the Xinjiang province has border security a top priority between both countries. Kyrgyzstan has relations problem with Uzbekistan ranging from energy trading, border mining by the Uzbeks and operations of the IMU<sup>21</sup>. All of these dynamic issues have President Bakiyev treading lightly and trying to utilize regional/bilateral agreements to settle these complicated problems.

## **Kazakhstan**

As the largest landmass in Central Asia, Kazakhstan is the centerpiece in strategic interest for Russia, China and US energy policy. Ethnic group data taken from a 1999 census provides the following: 53.4 percent Kazakh, 30 percent Russian, 3.7 percent Ukrainian, 2.5 percent Uzbek, 2.4 percent German and 1.4 percent Uyghur<sup>22</sup>. This diverse distribution makes two of the three

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 9. Kyrgyzstan was the first Central Asian state to join the WTO

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>22</sup> Martha B Olcott. "Country Profile: Kazakhstan", (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, December 2006, accessed 6 February 2007), available from <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/kztoc.html>,5

major powers (Russia and China) very interested in the economic security and stability within the country. Kazakhstan after its independence in 1991 suffered an economic downfall due to its inherent ties to Russia. Nursultan Nazarbayev rose from the ranks of the communist party to become Kazakhstan's first and only president to date. Current economic reforms and policy within Kazakhstan stress diversity from its primary economic export (energy) by raising other markets such as agriculture in order to obtaining membership in the WTO<sup>23</sup>.

Estimates on Kazakhstan's oil and natural gas were believe to be 1 percent of the world's reserve which equates to 35 billion barrels of oil and 1.9 trillion cubic meters of natural gas<sup>24</sup>. With its landlocked location, it is dependant upon Russian pipelines to transport oil and natural gas to European markets—making Russia a key player in investment by obtaining additional income from Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev has seen this as a potential pitfall and has been open to eastern and western investment to create other avenues to transport oil as well as natural gas into the market—such as China. Kazakhstan is the leader of hydrocarbon exports within the region and has significant foreign investment from major powers that accounts for 80 percent of all foreign investments going into the region<sup>25</sup>. A clear contradiction in Kazakhstan's economy strategy is its development of effective energy for its population. Currently the country imports electricity from Russia and natural gas from Uzbekistan due to its technological inability to create facilities that produce required needs. Vegetable products, metals and chemicals are other major exports Kazakhstan provides to its regional neighbors to maintain a balance economy<sup>26</sup>.

Relations with regional neighbors and the US is balancing act that Nazarbayev established right after independence in 1991. Kazakhstan views bilateral agreements and regional organization more than Kyrgyzstan –which explains why Kazakhstan openly accepted western invitations to join the rest of the world after 1991. By maintaining continued relations with

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<sup>23</sup> Martha B Olcott. *Country Profile: Kazakhstan*, 7. Negotiations with the WTO is ongoing

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 11. The US was the largest investor in 2005 with up to 12 billion dollars

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 9



Russia, opening economic dialogue with China and supporting US interest in the region, Kazakhstan has become a focal point for regional influence. Relations with neighboring countries have been stable except for the instability with Uzbekistan because of border disputes and Karimov's suspicion of Uzbek insurgents training in Kazakhstan<sup>27</sup>.

## **Summary**

Central Asian is a very dynamic region that is majority Islamic by religion, but politically controlled by secular governments. They all possess similar characteristics such as seeking economic reforms to stabilize the country, political reforms that eventually led to semi-authoritative state, human rights abuses and general distrust of each other (with Uzbekistan being in the center of most problems). The chapter provided key characteristics and factors about each of the states in an attempt to frame the conditions in which both the US and China entered the political as well as economic situation of Central Asia.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.,17

## CHAPTER TWO: US and Central Asia

The independence of Central Asian states in 1991 began a period of US involvement in the region that continues today. Initial military engagement with these states allowed the government to establish a baseline strategy of security, energy (investment and exploration) and political reforms through aid packages in order to establish a foothold in the region. As the Central Asian leaders developed, a fundamental change from political reforms—ranging from human rights, civil liberties and freedom of speech—to the status quo of authoritarian states began to emerge. The events of 9/11 put these political reforms on the sideline as the US began military operations in Afghanistan with basing support from some Central Asian states. This chapter provides a historical context of US engagement in Central Asia from its beginnings to the current environment that the US faces in a post 9/11 era. Development of US foreign policy, military-to military engagement and energy strategy provides a view of the regional dynamics in Central Asia.

### Establishment of Relations in Central Asia after 1991

Initial US engagement with Central Asia began under the auspices of PfP during its inception in 1994—three years after the independence of Central Asian states. The US strategic concept for PfP was an opportunity to influence emerging governments in the region to place interested post Soviet countries on a quick path to democracy and market economies<sup>28</sup>. A military-to-military cooperative approach was the basis of engagement for this region—along with Eastern and Central Europe, Baltic States, Balkans and Old Russia<sup>29</sup>—using an Army National Guard partnership with Central Asia known as the State Partnership Program (SPP). Rational for the use of the National Guard was in response to Latvia who wanted a national

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<sup>28</sup> John R. Groves Jr, “PfP and the State Partnership Program: Fostering Engagement and Progress”, *Parameters*, (Spring 1999), 43-46, accessed 15 September 2006, available from <http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/99spring/groves.htm>, 44

<sup>29</sup> John R. Groves Jr., 44

military based on the model of a citizen soldier<sup>30</sup>. This was an opportunity for the Chief of the National Guard Bureau to become involved in military-to-military cooperation with foreign militaries. Each state is assigned to sponsor an interested country which included the four Central Asia countries who were part of PfP—Kazakhstan (Arizona), Uzbekistan (Louisiana), Kyrgyzstan (Montana) and Turkmenistan (Nevada)<sup>31</sup>.

In a 1996 Foreign Affairs article, Fredrick Starr, a leading scholar of Central Asia proclaimed that Central Asia is in danger of influence from outside powers causing instability in the region and claimed stability is achievable through supporting Uzbekistan as an “anchor state”<sup>32</sup>. US policy makers began focusing on Uzbekistan as well as Kazakhstan—for its potential energy resources—as the hubs for stability with an increased emphasis military, economic and political assistance programs for the region. CENTRABAT-97 was the first military cooperative exercise held in Central Asia focusing on non Article V NATO missions—peacekeeping, crisis action planning and disaster relief—in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Advertised as a NATO PfP exercise by the US and international media, it was later clarified by NATO as a US-led “in the spirit of PfP” operation which only confused international opinion of NATO’s military cooperation in Central Asia<sup>33</sup>. “In the spirit of PfP” operations by NATO definitions is a national assistance program to partner countries wrapped in the guise of PfP activities<sup>34</sup>. This is nothing more than a bilateral relationship to confuse outside observers to these types of exercises<sup>35</sup>. PfP activity participation from Central Asia states increased from 1995 to 1997—from platoon to brigade level—and slowly begins to decline in 1998<sup>36</sup>. Uzbekistan as well as other countries in Central Asia began to recognize at this point that a bilateral relation with the US was strategically

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Gary K. Bertsch., ed. al. *Crossroad and Conflicts: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia*: (New York, N.Y: Routledge, 2000), 75.

<sup>33</sup> Robin Bhatti and Rachel Bronson. “NATO’s Mixed Signals in the Caucasus and Central Asia”, *Survival*, (Autumn 2000):132

<sup>34</sup> Robin Bhatti and Rachel Bronson., 132

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 133

more important than participating under NATO's PfP. This point in time also corresponded to increased security issues with the Taliban seizing control of Afghanistan and the rise in domestic terrorism along the Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan borders<sup>37</sup>. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) began in 1998 as a response to overthrow the authoritarian government of Uzbekistan. IMU received support from the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan to include sanctuary within its borders, providing terrorist training and funding<sup>38</sup>. US military assistance continued by providing counter-terrorism training, border security assistance and continued engagement in CENTRABAT exercises from 1998 to 2000.

### Initial US Foreign Policy

US foreign policy toward Central Asia in the mid 1990's focused on programs devoted to democratization and market reforms, health care, legal reforms, and housing of \$1.9 billion dollars between 1992 and 1999 through the Freedom Support Act (FSA)<sup>39</sup>. Threats of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferation, control of drugs entering Europe, spread of Islamic fundamentalism, defense and nuclear technology proliferation flowing into Iran presented key security threats for US interests in the region.<sup>40</sup> Uzbekistan as a focal point—defined by the 1996 report—for stability in Central Asia was given preference over the other states due to its natural resource potential—oil, natural gas, gold and uranium<sup>41</sup>. Economic investments by commercial companies in oil/natural gas exploration and business ventures expounded on the perceived importance of Uzbekistan to the US. Investment—commercial and government—rose steadily in Kazakhstan reflected emerging US energy policy to access its oil and natural gas. Regional stability in Central Asia considered a short-term policy by critics of US policy counters the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Jacquelyn K. Davis and Micheal J. Sweeney. *Central Asia in US Strategy and Operational Planning: Where Do We Go From Here*, (Washington D.C: The Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 2004), 32

<sup>39</sup> Robin Bhatti and Rachel Bronson., 133

<sup>40</sup> Gary K. Bertch. ed. al., 75

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

establishment of democracy and economic free markets for the region. Uzbekistan –under the watch of the US State department for its human right abuses—continues to disregard political and economic reforms but supports US policy within institutional organizations—such as the UN—as an ally for multinational cooperation in world affairs<sup>42</sup>. Tajikistan’s failure in political and economic reform in the mid 1990 led to Uzbekistan’s refusal to change its current policy. However, Kyrgyzstan during this period had successfully become a rising democratic society that has a multi-ethnic and religious culture within its borders. Since it lacks natural resources and any opportunity for foreign investment, this government struggles to maintain economic stability even though the US and World banking organizations continue to provide support.

Democratic reform is seen as a way to foster stability during this period primarily due to US commitment for ongoing military operations—which included PfP exercise, humanitarian operations such as Haiti as well as theater cooperation. The US was involved heavily in SFOR and KFOR in Kosovo placed Central Asia foreign policy secondary to operations in the Balkans. The rise of Islamic fundamentalist regimes within the region began in Afghanistan, but US support to Central Asian states was limited to a regional military advisory role—which included some military training and equipment support—to the Uzbekistan government in dealing with the IMU terrorist problem. Terrorism would eventually spread to its two neighboring countries (Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) providing a security dilemma in the region. Russia and China at this time was seen as an alternative choice for some of the Central Asia countries to—because of their stance against terrorism and ability to provide security guarantees—during the late 1990’s and 2000.

Adequate influence and pressure by the US for democratic and economic reforms within Central Asia can account for the rise of domestic terrorism in the region. As stated by Strobe Talbot, Acting Secretary of State in 1997:

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 76

“If economic and political reform...does not succeed, if internal and cross-border conflict simmer and flare, the region could become a breeding ground of terrorism, a hotbed of religious and political extremism, and a battleground for outright war...<sup>43</sup>”.

Nineteen ninety-nine marked the year of transition of US Policy in Central Asia. With increased terrorist attacks by Osama bin Ladin’s Al-Qaeda network around the world—to include hostage taking of American citizens<sup>44</sup>—, the Clinton administration begins to emphasize a commitment to an anti-terrorism campaign in the region—with intelligence sources identifying Al Qaeda operating out of the Taliban controlled Afghanistan. In the aftermath of armed incursions by the IMU into Kyrgyzstan in July-August 1999<sup>45</sup> Secretary of State Albright announced that the US provide \$3 million dollars to the Central Asia Security Initiative (CASI) to all countries in Central Asia to secure their borders against IMU or similar terrorist organizations<sup>46</sup>. As the US continued to provide funding for security initiatives—such as anti-terrorism—and energy development within Central Asia, the foundation of democracy thru reforms was seen as the primary method of maintaining stability in the region focusing primarily on Uzbekistan.

## **Transition of US Foreign Policy**

The US policy toward Central Asia remained steadfast with the change in US presidential leadership as the Bush administration acknowledged the rise in terrorism and drug trafficking in Central Asia. CIA director George Tenet in a Senate Select Committee reflected the linkage between drugs and terrorism in a February 2001 briefing by stating;

“The drug threat is increasingly intertwined with other threats. For example, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which allows Bin Ladin and other terrorist to operate to its territory, encourages and profits from drug trade. Some Islamic extremists view drug trafficking as a weapon against the West and a source of

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<sup>43</sup> Gary K. Bertch. ed. al., 78

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Wishnick. “*Growing US Security Interest in Central Asia*” (Carlisle Barracks, P.A: US Army War College, 2002), 5

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Wishnick., 5

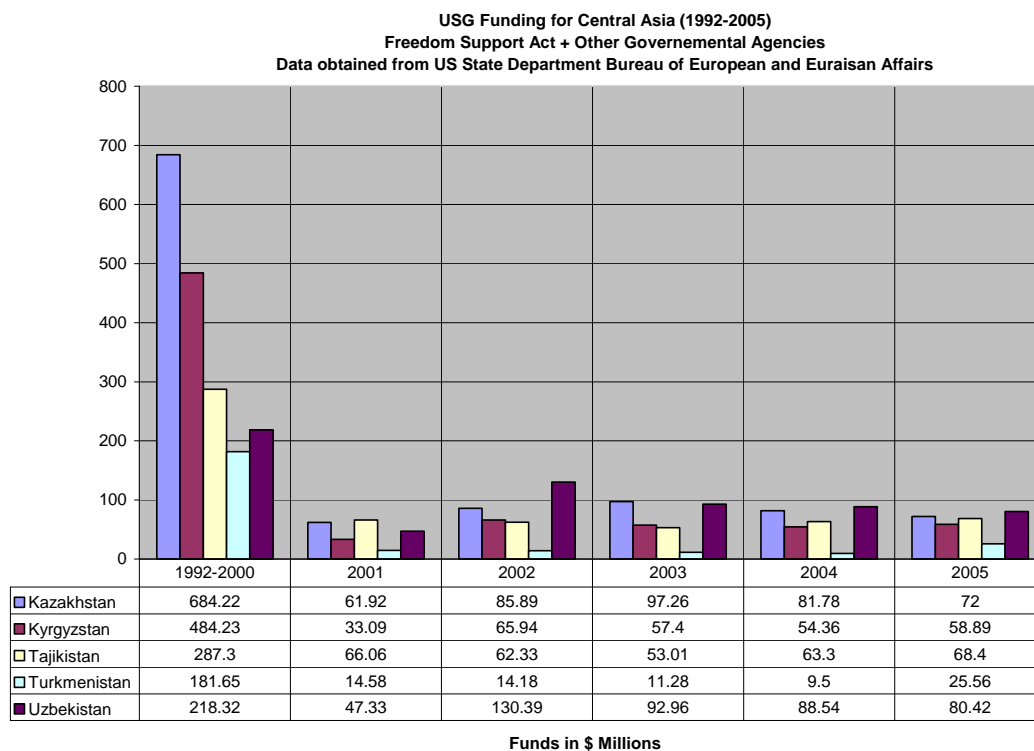
<sup>46</sup> Ibid

revenue to fund their operations...We are becoming increasingly concerned about the activities of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, an extremist and terrorist group whose annual incursion into Uzbekistan have become more bloodier and more significant every year<sup>47</sup>.”

This forewarning of increased terrorist activities in Central Asia did not correspond as a direct threat to the US at the time. These indicators of instability in Central Asia provided a view of transnational threats to the US after the events of September 11. President Bush and the administration’s views of Central Asia changed drastically as The Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) took center stage. Economic aid to Central Asia significantly increased as the GWOT took shape in Afghanistan as shown in below in Figures 2. Freedom Support Act and other government funding—DOD, DOE and DOI—provided the financial support to Central Asia countries to counter terrorism in the region and decisive military operations marked the transition of increased US interests in Central Asia under the GWOT.

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<sup>47</sup> LTC James E. DeTemple. “*Expanding Security Eastward: NATO Military Engagement in the South Caucasus and Central Asia*”, (Thesis, Boston, M.A: Boston University, 2001), 19.



**Figure 2: USG Funding to Central Asia<sup>48</sup>**

## US Security Interests in Central Asia

After the events of September 11, the US military focus shifted to Central Asia in order to defeat an apparent terrorist threat to US National Security within Afghanistan. Previous military engagements and cooperative exercises under PfP—such as CENTRABAT 2000—with Central Asian countries were seen by strategic planners as an opportunity to stage military assets for operations in Afghanistan. Initially, the Central Asian states reacted cautiously to the US request for support, but eventually offered to share intelligence, grant access to their airspace and provide basing for US and coalition aircraft—with the most important airbase established in Uzbekistan<sup>49</sup>. Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) commenced which resulted in removal of the Taliban government and the crippling of Osama Bin Ladin’s Al Qaeda terrorist network operating

<sup>48</sup> US Department of State Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, accessed 10 January 2007, available from <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rpt/c17328.htm>. Author created chart from available data on website.

<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth Wishnick. “*Growing US Security Interest in Central Asia*”, 13



in Afghanistan. The result of this successful military operation have led to fundamental questions on the future of US national policy—military, political and economic—in Central Asia. In a testimony to Congress in 2003, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian affairs stated that the US has three interests in Central Asia. These three are:

1. Security—anti-terrorism, nonproliferation, combating drug trafficking;
2. Energy—ensuring reliable and economically viable access to global markets and the use of energy revenues to promote sustainable development and;
3. Internal reforms—including democratization and market-orientated changes<sup>50</sup>

This relative shift of priorities in security interests coincided with the National Security Strategy of 2002 and 2006 to increase US engagement in Central Asia. Three of the key points applied directly to Central Asia within the NSS of 2002 and 2006 are to prevent the hostile domination of key areas and preserve a stable balance of power, address the threat of terrorism within weak states and ungoverned areas, and prepare the US to intervene in unexpected crisis<sup>51</sup>.

To assist weak and failing states in Central Asia—as defined by the National Security Strategy—, the US has to increase engagement in the region thru military, political and economic means to deter the rise of fundamentalist regimes in order to provide stability in the region. US military engagement in the region primarily focused on supporting military operations within Afghanistan and regional terrorist threats such as the IMU. Uzbekistan’s defense minister in 2002 stated, “from a military point of view, we don’t face any threats”<sup>52</sup> and continued to remove mines from its southern and eastern borders. With US military presence in the region—that has been reduced since the beginnings of Operation Iraqi Freedom—, will the US military become a fixed presence of Central Asia security in the future? One argument is that a permanent US military presence can provide a foothold to facilitate rapid response should a conflict erupt in the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 5

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>52</sup> Robert G. Kaiser, “US Plants Footprint in Shaky Central Asia”, *Washington Post*, 27 August 2002, accessed 30 September 2006, available from <http://proquest.umi/pdqweb?did=155660731&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientid=417&RQT=309&VName=PQD>

region<sup>53</sup>. This argument is similar to the current situation in Korea where the US maintains a military force to deter any North Korean military aggression against South Korea. A second argument would be that the US could utilize a new concept of establishing forward operating locations (FOL) in Central Asia in an austere or stripped down base or facility with minimum US presence that could be quickly utilized if a conflict arises<sup>54</sup>. This concept is similar to the argument of expanding US influence into the Black Sea region with purposed FOL in Bulgaria and Romania. Both of these arguments are sound for a military presence in the region, but current strains in military resources to meet current requirements—such as Iraq, Afghanistan and other contingency operations—restrict permanent basing in Central Asia.

Out of all of the Central Asia countries, Uzbekistan has benefited the most in economic and political assistance from the US after 9/11. As shown in Figures 2, Uzbekistan has received significant funding within the first two years of OEF (2002 and 2003). With the threat of Islamic fundamentalism spreading into the country from Afghanistan—mostly remnants of the IMU—Uzbekistan signed a five point Strategic Partnership and Cooperative Framework Agreement in March 2002 with the US. Major provisions of this partnership include:

1. US pledge to regard any external threat to the security and territorial integrity of Uzbekistan
2. Build a strong open civil society, establishment a multi party system and independence of the media and;
3. Strengthening non-governmental structures and improving judicial systems and eventually establish of a functional democracy in Uzbekistan and rule of law within the state<sup>55</sup>.

By focusing on the northern neighbor of Afghanistan for political and economic reforms, the US became dependant on Uzbekistan to become the future model of a democratic society in

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<sup>53</sup> Olga Oliker and David A. Shalpak, *US Interest in Central Asia*, (Arlington, V.A: Rand Corporation, 2005), 42

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Blank, *After Two Wars: Reflection on American Strategic Revolution in Central Asia*, Surrey, England: Conflict Studies Research Center-Defense Academy of the United Kingdom, 2005, accessed 25 November 2006, available from <http://www.da.mod.uk/csrfc>,4

<sup>55</sup> Jacquelyn K. Davis and Micheal J. Sweeney, 48

the region. However, the expectation of reform was not necessarily the same opinion shared by Uzbekistan's President Karimov who wanted to retain absolute power within his country. The necessity of US military basing of aircraft to support coalition forces in Afghanistan left the US in a compromising situation of using political and economic leverage for change within Uzbekistan.

The unapparent wiliness for Uzbekistan or any other Central Asia state to seek reforms stems from a multitude of differences ranging from ethnic conflicts to relative wealth from natural resources. Central Asia's independence from Russia has seen high increases in poverty, growth of unemployment, loss of traditional markets, trade outlets, and investment capital<sup>56</sup>. Coupled with semi-authoritarian governments within the region, the population becomes vulnerable to external influences such as organized crime and illicit trades for monetary means of survival—these activities include drug trafficking and weapons proliferation. This also provides an opportunity for Islamic organization such as the IMU—founded to destroy the Karimov government in Uzbekistan—to recruit personnel for activities against suppressive Central Asian governments. Organizations such as the IMU utilizes a propaganda campaign against the US for its economic support to Uzbekistan which is described as simply payoffs for propping up regional autocrats in exchange for military access<sup>57</sup>. This information campaign allowed most Central Asians to view the US as a country that has turned a blind eye against human rights abuses for support against the GWOT<sup>58</sup>.

In 2005, the US continued its pressure on Uzbekistan to expedite reforms led to significant changes in the US-Uzbekistan relations. It began with the US and international communities' harsh criticism of the Uzbekistan government during the Andijon riots in May 2005. The violent riots and subsequent peaceful protests were in support of local business men accused of having links with Islamic terrorist organizations led to the deaths of numerous civilians—some of whom

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<sup>56</sup> Olga Oliker and Thomas S. Szyana. *Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and the South Caucasus: Implications for the US Army*, (Arlington, V.A: Rand Cooperation, 2003),73

<sup>57</sup> Jacquelyn K. Davis and Micheal J. Sweeney., 38

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

were unarmed<sup>59</sup>. The allegations of human rights abuses from the international community led the US administration not to condemn Uzbekistan's actions against civilians in order to maintain stable relations for support of military operations in Afghanistan. Congressional pressure and eventual US support of the United Nations evacuation of Andijon refugees from Kyrgyzstan to Romania opened up an opportunity for rapprochement between Russia and Uzbekistan<sup>60</sup>. Russia and China supported Karmiov's justification of utilizing force in the Andijon incident resulted in a July 2005 order to expel all US forces from Karshi-Khanabad (K2) airbase within 180 days<sup>61</sup>. The significant factor of this incident severed US relations with Uzbekistan while increasing cooperation with Russia and China who want to minimize US influence in Central Asia.

With the loss of Uzbekistan as a primary supporter of US policy in the region, the US government began to focus more on Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan as the most prosperous state in Central Asia—due to its abundant natural gas and oil reserves—has become the most recent model of stability in the region for semi-democratic and economic reform. It is—as similar to all other regional countries—a strong supporter of GWOT and is the only Central Asian country to have sent troops to post war Iraq<sup>62</sup>. US security and increased pressure to continue political reforms within Central Asia has increased significantly after 9/11 with increased US military presence in the region and diplomacy efforts up to 2003 which has declined significantly since the US began military operations in Iraq. Central Asian experts in a 2006 conference described this redirection of US military effort as allowing Russia and China to “capitalize on the situation and pursue their efforts, eliminate the US military presence in the region and limit American oil

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<sup>59</sup> Eugene Rummer. “The US Interests and Role in Central Asia after K2”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2006, 141.

<sup>60</sup> Alexander Cooley. “PONARS Policy Memo No. 400—Difficult Engagements: Political Lessons from the K2 Experience”, December 2005, CSIS, accessed 3 January 2007, available from [http://www.csis.org/component/option,com\\_csis\\_pubs/task,view/id,2191/](http://www.csis.org/component/option,com_csis_pubs/task,view/id,2191/), 206

<sup>61</sup> Kimberly Martin. “PONARS Policy Memo No. 41--Understanding the Impact of the K2 Closure”, December 2005, CSIS, accessed 18 January 2007, available from [http://www.csis.org/component/option,com\\_csis\\_pubs/task,view/id,2190/](http://www.csis.org/component/option,com_csis_pubs/task,view/id,2190/), 211

<sup>62</sup> Patrick Goodenough. “US Interest in Central Asia Focuses on Kazakhstan”, *Cybercast News Service* (October 14, 2005), accessed 18 October 2006, available from <http://www.cnsnews.com/ViewPrint.asp?Page=\ForeignBureaus\archive\200510\FOR 2005>

interest there as well”<sup>63</sup>. One would consider these arguments valid in regards to the relatively small military presence in the region, but the claim that oil interest—as well as other natural resources the region offer—is an assumption that needs further defining. This event—as well as increased military operations in Iraq—is seen as a shift in long term policy toward Central Asia as the US shifted from its first element of active military engagement to the third element of diminishing underlying conditions within the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism (NSCT)<sup>64</sup>.

## US Energy Interest and Evolving Strategy

The increased demand for oil and natural gas around the world has led the US to re-evaluate its strategy for energy investment opportunities in Central Asia. Russia’s control of the oil and natural gas distribution in Europe from Central Asia has led to an increased effort by the US to establish a “diversification” energy strategy. The diversification strategy in Central Asia focuses on increased exploration and transportation of untapped natural resources into the world market to affect oil/natural gas prices<sup>65</sup>. This strategy looks at US investment in the construction of multiple oil/natural gas distribution routes through the Caspian region and toward the Black Sea region by excluding Russia and Iran influence on Central Asian energy<sup>66</sup>. Expansion of natural resource routes—primarily from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—south into Afghanistan and eventually into Pakistan serves the diversification strategy. Currently there is a memorandum of understanding between these countries to construct a Central Asian Oil Pipeline (CAOP) that opens up an export market to the Pakistan deepwater port of Gwadar—this project is going on

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<sup>63</sup> Michael Rywkin. “US Interest in Central Asia Focuses on Kazakhstan”, *Cybercast News Service* (October 14, 2005), accessed 18 October 2006, available from <http://www.cnsnews.com/ViewPrint.asp?Page=\ForeignBureaus\archive\200510\FOR 2005>, 9

<sup>64</sup> Eugene Rummer., 147.

<sup>65</sup> CPT Michael A. Peterson. “*China’s Great Game in Central Asia: Implications to US Policy in the Region*”. (Thesis, Newport R.I: Naval Post Graduate School, 2005), 48

<sup>66</sup> Michael Rywkin., 16

relatively slow due to the instability of Afghanistan and expected to be completed in 10-20 years<sup>67</sup>.

Foreign direct investments (FDI) into Central Asian natural resources have been limited to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan—prior to shift in US-Uzbek relations. In a US Department of State country report, Uzbekistan since its independence has received around \$500 million in FDI from US companies that include Texaco and Baker Hughes whom both specialized in oil and gas exploration<sup>68</sup>. Kazakhstan has clearly been the benefactor of US FDI of energy exploration and development since 1993 with \$30.7 billion equating to 76% of all FDI into the country<sup>69</sup>. With strained US-Uzbekistan relations after 2005, FDI of US companies has slowed down significantly in Central Asia leaving Kazakhstan as the mantle of regional energy diversification without support from other western nations.

US support to Afghanistan—focused on maintaining stability and prevention of public support of Al-Qaeda—have some roots tied into the current energy diversification strategy. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan—as described in Chapter One—have significant amount of hydroelectric power that can supply power to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Secretary of State Rice announced a \$1.4 billion initiative along with FDI from the Asian Development Bank and World Bank in hydroelectric infrastructure to support this initiative<sup>70</sup>. This initiative provides an opportunity for stabilization in Afghanistan, increased political support for Pakistan against terrorism and another source of energy for India to handle increased demands.

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<sup>67</sup> Michael Cohen. “Country Analysis Briefs—Central Asia”, September 2006, Energy Information Administration, accessed 13 December 2006, available from <http://www.eia.doe.gov/cabs/Centasia/Full.html>,3

<sup>68</sup> US Department of State. “Uzbekistan Country Profile”, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, July 2005, accessed 15 January 2007, available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2924.htm>

<sup>69</sup> US Department of State. “Kazakhstan Country Profile”, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, September 2006, accessed 15 January 2007, available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5487.htm>

<sup>70</sup> Michael Rywkin., 21

## **Summary**

US interest in Central Asia under the auspices of NATO's PfP provided a venue for initial military-to-military engagement and basis for US foreign policy in the region (Security, Energy and Political). Security assistance programs in support of secular governments against Islamic fundamentalism continue to be the main focus of US efforts in the region which is closely followed by political stability—for some Central Asian states. Although political change in the region has been occurring slowly, the apparent pressure of the US through aid packages has caused some problems in foreign relations—in specifically Uzbekistan. Energy development and implementation of a diversification strategy for energy resources also remains a problem as other regional actors (China and Russia) make efforts to remove US influence from Central Asia. With the US focused primarily in the Middle East, Central Asian states will most likely remain a void in US foreign policy filled by other regional actors and organizations.

### CHAPTER THREE: China and Central Asia

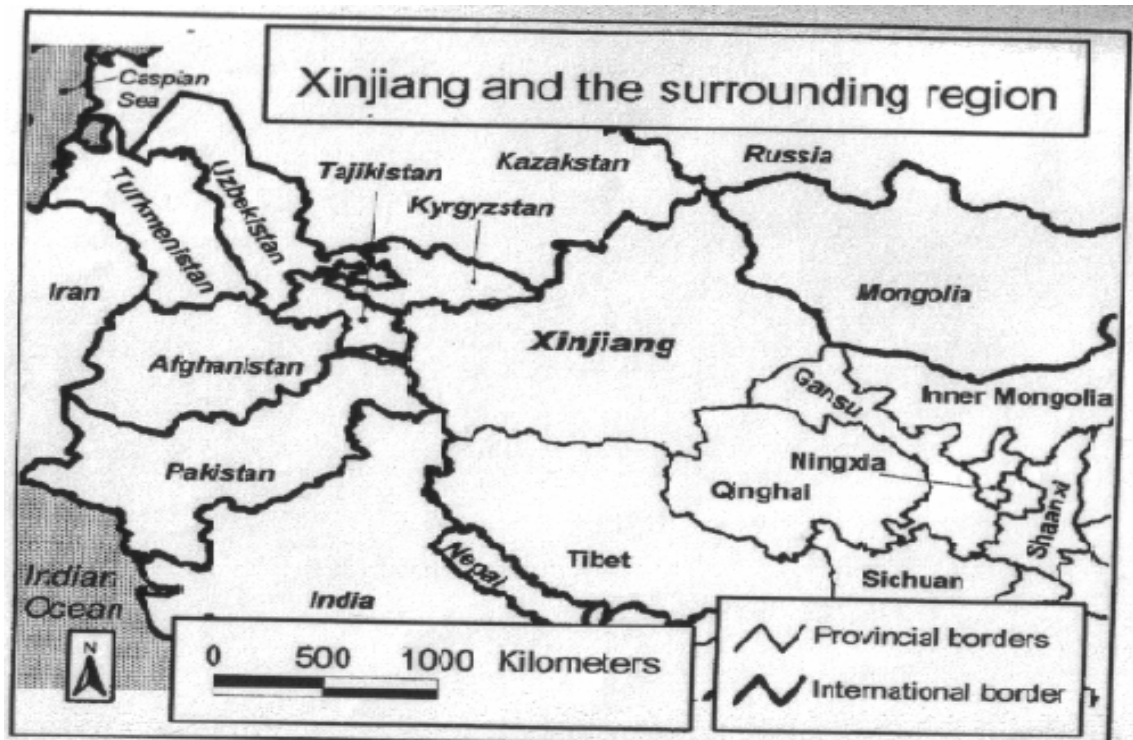


Figure 3: Map of Xinjiang<sup>71</sup>

China's influence and culture have been a part of Central Asia since ancient times. This chapter begins with China's historical presence in Central Asia in order to establish the framework of its strategic interest within the region. The use of security/stability, economic development, energy and a new strategic environment after 1991 provides the foundation for China's development of its "grand strategy". China's development of this "grand strategy" produced a regional multilateral organization that has allowed China to currently maintain significant influence in the region. The topics presented in this chapter provide a clear understanding of Chinese influence and Central Asia's strategic importance. Figure 4, above shows the Xinjiang region of northwest China which represents the gateway for interaction within Central Asia.

<sup>71</sup> S. Fredrick Starr. ed., *Xinjiang-China's Muslim Borderland*, (Armonk, N.Y. ME Sharpe, 2004), xv



## Historical Presence in Central Asia

China's presence in Central Asia began over 2000 years ago in the Chinese Han dynasty (206 B.C- 220 A.D). Seen as a gateway to the west, China secured land routes and established trade with the Roman Empire. Known as the "Silk Road", this route allowed Chinese products—primarily silk—land access to western and Middle Eastern countries. The development of the Silk Road coincided with the Han's western empire expansion and encounters with a Turkic nomadic tribe in Central Asia known as the Xiongnu—a people who had ties with the Huns<sup>72</sup>. Encounters with the Xiongnu to secure the Silk Road led to China expanding its control further into Central Asia in order to maintain a gateway to the west. The Han Empire eventually collapsed due to internal conflict and led to China's loss of Central Asia in 220 A.D.

The reunification of China under the Tang Dynasty (581-902 A.D.) brought Central Asia into the forefront as a potential source of economic and cultural trade. China began to expand their influence deeper into Central Asia than the Han Dynasty, eventually coming into direct contact with the Muslim people of greater Turkestan—a diverse Islamic group consisting of Arab, Tibetan and Uyghurs<sup>73</sup>. A battle between the Muslims and China in 751 A.D.—the battle of Talas—led to a Tang defeat and increased Arab control of the region. China's defeat in the battle and subsequent instability led to the fall of the Tang Empire and control of Central Asia.

China's internal stability during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) led to a territorial expansion campaign into Central Asia. After gaining control of Taiwan and Tibet, Qing seized control of "Chinese Central Asia" in 1757 after defeating the Mongol and Uyghur army<sup>74</sup>. Qing rule was minimal as he allowed religious and local leaders to maintain relative control of the region. The expansionist campaign by the Qing coincided with Russian expansion into Central Asia and led to a series of battles from 1751-1881 that resulted in a treaty with Russia over

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<sup>72</sup> CPT Michael A Peterson., 5

<sup>73</sup> Gill Bates. *China's New Journey to the West: China's Emergence in Central Asia and Implications for US Interest*, (Washington, D.C. CSIS Press, 2003), 3

<sup>74</sup> Gill Bates., 4. Chinese Central Asia is the present day Xinjiang Province in northwestern China.

disputed territory<sup>75</sup>. In 1884, the Xinjiang (which translates to new territory) region comprising of a large minority of Uighurs—ethnic Turkic and Muslim—became part of the Qing Empire that eventually broke away for China after the Qing Dynasty fell in 1911.

Xinjiang was ruled from 1911-1944 by a series of tribal leaders which banded together to form the Republic of Eastern Turkistan in 1944<sup>76</sup>. When the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) formed in 1949, it regained control of Xinjiang as part of China and used military force to maintain this control. Relations with Central Asian states were limited due to China-Russian relations over border disputes and continued Russian support to the minority Uyghur separatist in Xinjiang province. With the decline of Russian influence in Central Asia in the late 1980's and eventual independence of Central Asian states in 1991, China's interest in this region began to re-emerge after 80 years of limited contact.

## **Interests in Central Asia after 1991**

With the decline of Russian influence in Central Asia, China viewed this as an opportunity to develop relations and influence the newly independent Central Asian states. China was one of the first countries to recognize the Central Asian states and formally established full diplomatic relations with each state in 1992. Development of a foreign/regional policy for Central Asian became an immediate priority focusing on four specific areas:

1. Stability and security on its western frontier;
2. Economic development of inland regions;
3. Need for energy and;
4. Relative position in the new strategic environment<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> CPT Michael A Peterson., 6

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>77</sup> Mark Burles. *Chinese Policy Toward Russia and the Central Asian Republics*. (Arlington, V.A: Rand Corporation, 1999), 5

## Stability and Security

China views stability as a focal point of relations with all five Central Asia states. However the bulk of its foreign /regional policy focuses on three Central Asian states that border the Xinjiang province—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In order to maintain stability and security within Xinjiang, China realized that their top priority is to contain the influence of Islamic fundamentalism and pan-Turkic activities in China through the support of secular governments in Central Asia<sup>78</sup>. This apparently linked Central Asian stability to Xinjiang security that became the basis of all Central Asia foreign/regional policies to date. In order to meet this primary objective, one of the first actions taken by China was to settle border disputes with all three states that shared 3000 km of its western border. China entered a series of bilateral agreements with Kazakhstan from 1994-1997 and Kyrgyzstan from 1996-1999 settling all disputed territory<sup>79</sup>. The disputed territory with Tajikistan led to a 2002 agreement with China who turned over 28,000 square kilometers of land to the Tajikistan government<sup>80</sup>. Another threat to stability was reminisce of nuclear weapons that Kazakhstan maintained after their independence. In series of talks with Kazakhstan, China (as well as US and Russia) convinced them to give up their weapons by:

1. Linking the issue to future economic aid;
2. Former communist countries (Ukraine and Belarus) giving their weapons back to Russia and;
3. Receiving security guarantees from the US, Russia and China in 1995<sup>81</sup>.

Since incorporating Xinjiang in 1759, the Uighur minority has resisted China's control up until the 1950's when the PRC began a migration program of its Han Chinese population in order to establish and maintain government control. The migration of Han Chinese into Xinjiang set

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<sup>78</sup> Boris Z Rummer., ed., *Central Asia—A Gathering Storm*, (Armonk, N.Y. ME Sharpe, 2003), 178

<sup>79</sup> Roy Allison and Lena Johnson., ed. *Central Asian Security—The New International Context*. (Washington, D.C, Brookings Institute Press, 2001), 154

<sup>80</sup> CPT Michael A Peterson., 37

<sup>81</sup> Roy Allison and Lena Johnson., ed, 155.

into motion increased tensions between the Uighur minority and Beijing government starting with the re-emergence of Islamic beliefs in the 1970's. During this period, the spread of Islam led to the region having the highest number of mosque per capita in the world in the mid 1980's<sup>82</sup>. With this religious change, radical Islamic ideology begins to emerge with the opening of schools and practices of religious activities not supported by the PRC. Radical Islamic ideology eventually led to the unification of Uighur separatist and terrorist organizations—such as the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and Islamic Organization of Turkistan—who took action against the government by conducting a series of bombings in Xinjiang beginning from 1997 to the present.

Although the PRC established harsh military and governmental actions against these organizations, external support (training and economic assistance) from other regional as well as transnational terrorist organizations provided safe havens from the PRC—such as the Taliban government and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. When the Central Asian states received their independence from Russia, China viewed this as encouragement for Uighur separatists to want their independence as well. One reason is the small minority of Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and one million Kazakhs that reside in Xinjiang with seven million Uighurs are receptive to anti-Chinese influence from the Central Asian states<sup>83</sup>. This concern is the basis for China's security interest in Central Asia—especially with Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan—to establish political relations and support of the secular governments in Central Asia against terrorism, separatism and extremism—also known as the “three evils”—within Xinjiang<sup>84</sup>.

## Economic Development

The independence of Central Asian states in 1991 provided China an opportunity to economically develop its interior provinces and potentially re-establish a modern “Silk Road” in

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 161

<sup>83</sup> Mark Burles., 9

<sup>84</sup> CPT Michael A Peterson., 17

the region. Economic interaction allowed China the means to fight separatism within its frontier provinces and strengthen secular Central Asian governments against religious or ethnic based groups who supported anti-government organizations in China—such as Xinjiang<sup>85</sup>. With its ethnic ties and open border, the minority population could interact with neighboring states in Central Asia making Xinjiang key to China’s economic strategy. In 1992, the Xinjiang government received permission from the State Council to open up its borders for economic activities. By 1995, all of Xinjiang’s 16 provinces, areas, prefectures and cities received state ratification and licenses allowing them to engage in foreign trade<sup>86</sup>. China readdressed the importance of trade and economic development again in 2000 with its “Go West” policy focusing on expanded Central Asian trade and economic development resulting in a majority of all business activities conducted in Xinjiang.

Xinjiang—as the center of trade for Central Asia—exports are evenly divided between primary products (including food) and manufactured goods that were produced nearer the coast<sup>87</sup>. Increased trade and economic investment in Central Asia focused toward Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan because of the ethnic minorities residing in Xinjiang. China’s interaction with Central Asian states further west to the Caspian Sea decreased as other regional actors—Iran, Russian and Turkey—competed in these open markets. Even with competition for trade with other regional powers, China was able to exceed \$5 billion in 2004, which accounts for small amount of trade volume within Central Asia<sup>88</sup>. Of the three Central Asian states that border China, Kazakhstan is the largest trading partner with China to date and Xinjiang’s geo-strategic location allowed President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan to state in 2004;

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<sup>85</sup> Mark Burles., 14

<sup>86</sup> Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, ed, 164.

<sup>87</sup> Martin C Spechler. “Crouching dragon, hungry tigers: China and Central Asia”, *Contemporary Economic Policy*; April 2003; 21, 2; ABI/INFORM Global, 274

<sup>88</sup> Charles Hawkins and Robert R. Love. ed. “*The New Great Game—Chinese Views on Central Asia*”, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2006), 87-88

“Xinjiang is one of the fastest growing areas in economic activity. In the total \$3-billion trade volume between China and Kazakhstan, about \$2.5 billion is done here. The impact of Xinjiang on Kazakhstan is sure to grow here in the future”<sup>89</sup>.

With smaller economies than Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan minimal trade volume allowing Chins to focus more on direct investment and loans to maintain economic relations.

In order to maintain an economic presence in Central Asia through trade, China views foreign direct investments and loans in order to maintain stability within the Central Asian governments. Investments in infrastructure (railways and roads) have allowed China to maintain trade with Central Asian states that include a potential rail link between Xinjiang and Uzbekistan going through Kyrgyzstan<sup>90</sup>. Direct investment in Central Asian totaled \$500 million, which is a 100 times larger than Central Asian governments can provide for themselves<sup>91</sup>. Loans to Central Asian states such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to purchase Chinese commercial goods are governmental incentives to support China’s policy against the “three evils” in Xinjiang. Although trading volume is relatively low for China compared to other regions, China views economic development of Xinjiang and Central Asia as an imperative link to stabilize the region against Islamic fundamentalism.

## Energy

China’s interaction with Central Asian states within the energy market has increased since exceeding its energy self-sufficiency in 1993. China currently ranks third in the world in energy production and second in consumption behind the US. This has brought a growing competition for resources throughout the world. Most of the domestic energy resources in China are located in the northern and a northwest province (Xinjiang Region) has made stability/security of these areas vital to China’s economic wellbeing. After the Central Asian states gained their independence, China began economic and trade negotiations with energy rich

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<sup>89</sup> Charles Hawkins and Robert R. Love. ed., 103

<sup>90</sup> Gill Bates., 29

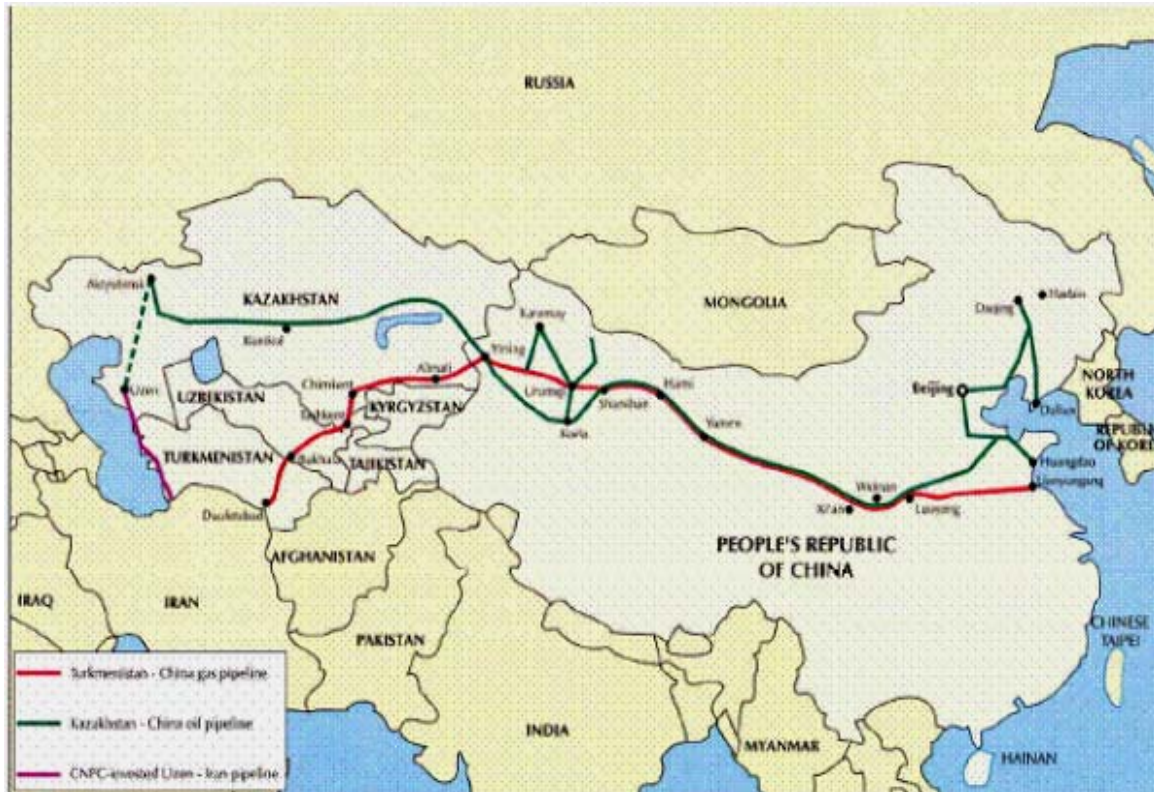
<sup>91</sup> Martin C Spechler., 580

states along the Caspian basin in order to establish a foothold in the energy market. In 2004, Chinese imports totaled 122.7 million tons of oil with 65 percent of the imports coming from the Middle East and African nations traversing through the Indonesia Malacca straits<sup>92</sup>. China's energy strategy is to diversify its energy resources beyond unstable Middle Eastern and African nations by establishing a foothold in Central Asian overland routes into China. With established political and economic ties in Central Asia, China began its energy diversification strategy with Kazakhstan through a series of purchases made by the China Petroleum and Natural Gas Company (CPNC). Beginning in 1997, CPNC purchased 60.3 percent of the shares in the Akzubin project in Kazakhstan increasing to 85.6 percent in 2003<sup>93</sup>. China and Kazakhstan also agreed to establish an oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea into Xinjiang with further distribution into eastern China. China established similar energy deals with Turkmenistan to establish a natural gas pipeline into Xinjiang and the CPNC brokered deal to construct oil pipelines connecting into the Kazakhstan line from Turkmenistan. Figure 4 displays the oil and natural gas pipelines from Central Asia into Xinjiang and the importance of this region for China's energy diversity.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 151

<sup>93</sup> Charles Hawkins and Robert R. Love. ed., 152



**Figure 4: Oil and Natural Gas Pipeline into China<sup>94</sup>**

China's ability to secure other unexplored energy supplies led to improved relations with Uzbekistan. With increased US and international pressure on President Karimov's use of military force during the Andijon riots, Uzbekistan began to move away from the western powers. This led to the expulsion of US forces from the K2 airbase and increased economic cooperation with China. China and President Karimov established a long-term cooperation in the exploration and exploitation of natural resources—oil and natural gas—, which resulted in China providing a \$600 million loan to Uzbekistan for pipeline construction<sup>95</sup>. China's increasing demands for energy and diversification of imports is part of an equation presented by Yang Yu who wrote, "When oil imports exceed 100 million tons, it must take diplomatic, economic or military

<sup>94</sup> CPT Michael A Peterson., 73

<sup>95</sup> Ariel Cohen. "The Dragon Looks West: China and the Shanghai Cooperative Organization", September 2006, *Heritage Lectures*, accessed 1 November 2006, available from <http://www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/hl961.cfm>, 4



measures to secure its energy security”<sup>96</sup>. China has met each of these conditions by maintaining military means to secure its internal sources from terrorist activities in Xinjiang and using diplomatic as well as economic means within Central Asia.

## New Strategic Environment

With the collapse of the Soviet Union ending the Cold War, China’s fear of US “hegemony” in international affairs led to a change in China’s strategy. Issues on human rights abuses, Taiwan and economic reforms in the 1990’s allowed the remaining unipolar power (US) to maintain political and economic pressure on China. A pole describes “a country that possesses powerful comprehensive strength—a combination of political stability, solid economic strength, strong military power as well as well-developed scientific and technological capabilities”<sup>97</sup>. With the US having unipolar influence especially after its successful military operations during Operation Desert Storm, China’s view on increased US influence against them became a potential reality. To counter this strategy, China developed a multi-polar strategy in 1996 that focuses on two key efforts:

1. By embracing regional and foreign policies to enhance China as a responsible player within the international community (multilateralism) and;
2. Make an effort to establish and maintain bilateral relations with regional neighbors as well as world powers<sup>98</sup>.

As a concerted effort, Beijing feels comfortable in operating in a multipolar international system that facilitates a balance of power allowing for smaller, less powerful nations to make decisions that can favor China’s national interest. Many experts have viewed China’s acceptance of a multipolar system as “temporary”, but Chinese officials assert, “China will never be a hegemon, never practice power politics, and never pose a threat to its neighbors or to the world

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<sup>96</sup> Charles Hawkins and Robert R. Love. ed., 97

<sup>97</sup> Mark Burles., 29-30

<sup>98</sup> Avery Goldstein. “China’s Grand Strategy and US Foreign Policy”, *American Diplomacy*, 27 September 2005, accessed 15 October 2006, available from [http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2005/0709/gold/gold\\_china.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2005/0709/gold/gold_china.html), 3

peace”<sup>99</sup>. China continues to stress its concerns of maintaining a “multipolar world” in a June 2005 bilateral statement issued by China’s President Hu Jintao and Russian President Vladimir Putin calling on countries to “renounce striving for monopoly and domination in international affairs and attempts to divide nation’s leaders and those being led”<sup>100</sup>. This statement clearly targets the US as the sole superpower in the world and provides forward momentum in China’s quest to limit US influence in Central Asia. China’s application of their strategy in Central Asia provides an opportunity to analyze its effectiveness compared to the US strategy in Chapter Four.

## Evolution of Grand Strategy in Central Asia

China’s development of its grand strategy is traced back to the development of the “*Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*” between China and India in the 1950’s. The five principles are:

1. Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity;
2. Mutual non-aggression;
3. Non-interference in each other’s internal affairs;
4. Equality and mutual benefit and;
5. Peaceful coexistence<sup>101</sup>.

These set of principles provide the basis for bilateral relations with Central Asia upon their independence in 1991. Chinese Premier, Li Peng articulated in 1994 speech of his vision of bilateral relation between China and Central Asia is similar—if not the same—as the five principles of peaceful coexistence. His vision of relations with Central Asia applied four principles:

1. Unswerving commitment to good-neighbor relations and peaceful coexistence;

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<sup>99</sup> Avery Goldstein., 4

<sup>100</sup> Frederick W Stakelbeck. “A New Bloc Emerges”, August 2005, *The American Thinker*, accessed 3 October 2006, available from [http://www.americanthinker.com/articles\\_print.php?article\\_id=4703](http://www.americanthinker.com/articles_print.php?article_id=4703), 2

<sup>101</sup> People’s Republic of China in India. “Backgrounder: Five Principle of Peaceful Coexistence”, 14 June 2004, accessed 10 March 2007, available from <http://in.china-embassy.org/eng/ssygd/fiveprinciple/t132640.htm>

2. Development of mutually beneficial cooperation and promotion of common prosperity;
3. Respect for the choice of the people of each country and nonintervention in the internal affairs of the other party and;
4. Respect for the sovereignty of each state and the promotion of regional stability<sup>102</sup>.

With these guiding principles, China's development of its grand strategy began to take form beginning with settling border disputes, security issues (primarily in Xinjiang) and establishing economic ties with its border states. Multilateral relations began in 1996 with the development of the "*Shanghai Five*" that consisted of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that focused primarily on border security issues—which included negotiations of borders. The five countries signed a series of treaties that incorporated the five principles of peaceful coexistence in maintaining trust and confidence among them. "The Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions" of 1996 and "The Treaty on Reduction of Military Forces in Border Regions" of 1997 became the pillars of trust and confidence for border security that embodied guidelines for future cooperation between the five states<sup>103</sup>.

Increasing terrorism, separatism and extremism activities in the region facilitated an expanded agenda within the organization until its fifth anniversary in 2001. The Shanghai Five re-organized to the Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO) and added Uzbekistan to created a multinational regional security organization. China's influence within the Shanghai Five and the newly created SCO provided an opportunity to expand the five principles of peaceful coexistences as part of the SCO's main goals. The main goals presented in the founding declaration of the SCO in 2001 are:

1. Strengthening mutual trust and good-neighborliness and friendship among member states
2. Developing their effective cooperation in political affairs, the economy, and trade, science and technology, culture, education, energy, transportation, environmental protection and other fields;

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<sup>102</sup> Boris Z. Rummer. ed., 179

<sup>103</sup> Charles Hawkins and Robert R. Love. ed., 123

3. Working together to maintain regional peace, security and stability and;
4. Promoting the creation of a new international political and economic order featuring democracy, justice and rationality<sup>104</sup>

With this declaration, the SCO was able to begin a period of stability that went beyond border demarcation and security. China viewed the significance of this multilateral organization as a means to provide a security safeguard mechanism by utilizing institutional means for engagement in Central Asian affairs while reducing US influence in the region<sup>105</sup>. The US significantly increased its activities in the region after the attacks of 9/11 against the Taliban government and Al-Qaeda. SCO member states supported the developing US anti-terrorism campaign in the region. SCO support began to shift once the US began military operations in Iraq with both China and Russia condemning their action in the UN. This shift of US resources toward the Middle East provided China an opportunity to expand its influence in regional security within the SCO. The SCO established a “Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure” (RATS) in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in 2004 to coordinate activities against “the three evils” of terrorism, separatism and extremism<sup>106</sup>.

Since the SCO officially formed in 2001, it has included four states—India, Pakistan, Mongolia and Iran—as observers within the organization. It has also expanded their initial cooperation objectives beyond border security and anti-terrorism to areas such as disaster relief, law enforcement, transportation, and economic cooperation. This has allowed some western observers to view this organization as a “NATO of the east”<sup>107</sup>. However, there are western skeptics who have label the SCO as “the most dangerous organization that America has never

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<sup>104</sup> CPT Michael A Peterson., 15

<sup>105</sup> Charles Hawkins and Robert R. Love. ed.,20

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 121

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 121

heard of”<sup>108</sup>. This lack of attention has served China’s purpose of developing its grand strategy over the last decade to limit US influence in the region. The SCO and Central Asian states will continue to serve as a test bed for China’s evolution of its grand strategy as their influence continues to expand into other regions of the world—such as Africa and South America.

## **Summary**

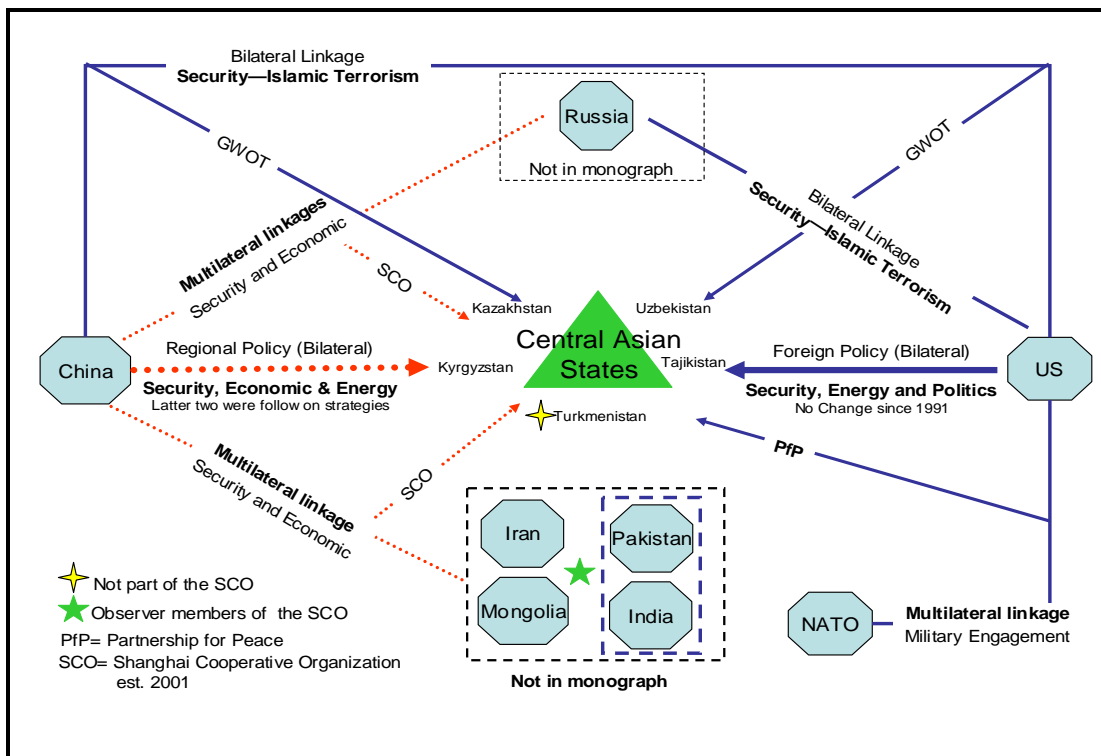
In summary, China historical presence in Central Asia has been one of territorial expansion, internal security against the “three evils” and economic growth. With the decline of Russian influence in the region, China utilized its five principles to establish bilateral relations with the Central Asian states in order to establish a foothold in the region. This initial foothold resulted in the development of China’s grand strategy and a regional security organization that has caught the attention of western observers. China’s interest in stability/security, economic development and energy continues to drive their goals of decreasing US influence in order to maintain a geo-strategic advantage in the region.

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<sup>108</sup> Kin-Ming Liu. “The Most Dangerous Unknown Pact”, *New York Sun*, 13 July 2006, accessed 30 September 2006, available from <http://www.nysun.com/pf.php?id=34366>

## CHAPTER FOUR: Comparative Analysis of US and China's Strategy in Central Asia

Foreign policy within Central Asia between China and the US has some similarities and significant differences in implementation. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comparative analysis of these similarities and differences using three of the four elements of national power (Economic, Diplomatic, and Military) as a model. The fourth element of national power (Information) is not presented in this chapter and goes beyond the scope of this monograph. The differences and similarities presented will provide insight into who has the strategic advantage for each instrument of power. In order to begin this comparative analysis, a review of the strategies used by China and Central Asia is shown below in Figure 5



**Figure 5: Mind Map of US and China Strategy in Central Asia**

Figure 5 represents a mind map of US and China policies/strategies within Central Asia. Information within the closed boxes—Russia, Iran, Mongolia, Pakistan and India—is not part of the comparative analysis and only provides context for US and China's interaction within the

region. Solid lines from the US and dashed lines from China represent linkages—either multilateral or bilateral—to Central Asian states or regional powers. Arrow leading into the Central Asian states represents the “means” to execute this linkage of China or US policy and strategy. The description of this mind map and subsequent analysis will follow the methodology of this monograph presenting the US followed by China’s strategy.

## **Mind Map Description**

US strategy for Central Asia began after the Central Asian states independence in 1991 thru its multilateral contacts with NATO. Thru NATO’s partnership for peace (PfP), the US initially established military-to-military cooperation and engagement set up the initial development for bilateral negotiations with Central Asian states. With a firm establishment in military-to-military engagements—utilizing CENTRABAT exercises—in the early to late 1990’s, US foreign policy developed into three areas: Security, Energy and Politics. These three key areas remain the foundation of US foreign policy toward Central Asia to date. After 9/11, bilateral linkages were established with Russia and China to support US military operations in Afghanistan against Islamic terrorism—the Taliban government and Al Qaeda. The means to execute these bilateral relations into Central Asian is the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Military operations in Iraq have reduced US personnel in the region, but the GWOT bilateral relations with Russia and China reflect the top interest of US foreign policy in the region.

China’s historical relations with Central Asia have allowed them to develop a growing regional policy over the last 2000 years. With a Muslim population in Xinjiang that is ethnically related to it Central Asian neighbors, China has viewed bilateral negotiations with these states as imperative to its national security since their independence in 1991. Economic development and later energy resources became additional means of a regional policy to maintain stability in Central Asia and Xinjiang. Development of bilateral relation with it Central Asian neighbors and Russia has allowed China to develop multilateral linkages for security against Islamic

fundamentalism that later expanded into economic development for the region. The means to execute this multilateral linkage was initially the “Shanghai Five” and evolved to the Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO). With it four observer member states, China has linked it bilateral and multilateral policy into one coherent “grand strategy”.

## Economic Analysis

The Freedom Support Act (FSA) of 1992 is the cornerstone of US economic strategy in Central Asia. Funding from this act has allowed government agencies to establish programs that target US strategic interests—from democratic reforms to military cooperation. Total US economic assistance for Central Asia comes from the FSA and other governmental funds that focus on five areas: *Democratic Reforms, Economic Reforms, Security and Law Enforcement, Social Reforms, and Cross Cutting Initiatives*<sup>109</sup>. In 2005, FSA funds expended to Central Asia totaled \$159 million—Kyrgyzstan received the largest amount of \$41.84 million—with non-FSA funds totaling \$146 million—with Uzbekistan receiving the largest amount of \$42.88 million prior to US-Uzbek relations declining<sup>110</sup>. Majority of the non-FSA funds received by Uzbekistan was from the Department of Defense (DOD) in order to maintain US military capability in the country and support Uzbeks operations against the IMU.

The main goal of the FSA was to encourage the US companies—primarily energy companies—to invest in the development of a Central Asia private sector focused on energy development<sup>111</sup>. US energy companies such as Chevron-Texaco became majority investors—up to 50 percent ownership—with other regional companies for energy development along the

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<sup>109</sup> US Department of State. “FY 2005 Funds Budgeted for US Government Regional Assistance Programs for Central Asia”. Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, accessed 15 January 2007, available from <http://www.state.gov/documents/organizations/63290.pdf>

<sup>110</sup> Ibid

<sup>111</sup> White House. “Freedom Support Act of 1992 Fact Sheet”, Office of the Press Secretary, April 1992, accessed 19 January 2007, available from <http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/offdocs/b920401.htm>



Caspian Sea<sup>112</sup>. US foreign investment, FSA and Non-FSA funding for Central Asian states require that each of the governments proceed with established reforms. As shown in Chapter Three, US has used these funds to pressure Central Asian governments to make reforms or show progress—such as democratic elections and human rights. These pressures have led some of the Central Asian states to make some reform changes—such as Kyrgyzstan—while others—such as Uzbekistan—have rejected US influence for reform changes and have gravitated toward other regional powers. The use of a “carrot” approach continues to be a major consideration in maintaining an economic strategy in Central Asia.

China’s economic strategy within Central Asia rests upon three key factors: trade, foreign aid and direct investment (energy and business). China’s economic trade strategy focuses on the security and economic development of the Xinjiang province through commercial goods—with lower cost and numerous quantities. This economic trade strategy is critical for maintaining social stability among its Central Asian neighbors—Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in particular—as well as their Muslim minority in Xinjiang<sup>113</sup>. With the governments’ support to establish direct trade and business transactions in the mid 1990’s, Xinjiang has become a strategic hub for China’s economic strategy within Central Asia—with 80 to 90 percent of all business transactions conducted in Xinjiang<sup>114</sup>. Kazakhstan—with the largest minority in Xinjiang—is the largest trading partner with China and has significantly benefited with an estimated \$4 billion of the \$5 billion trade volume within Central Asia in 2004<sup>115</sup>.

In order to maintain economic ties with Central Asian states, China will typically provide aid to its neighbors to maintain stable relations. China for example granted Kyrgyzstan \$5.7

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<sup>112</sup> US Department of State. “Kazakhstan Country Profile”, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, September 2006, accessed 15 January 2007, available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5487.htm>

<sup>113</sup> Philip C Saunders., *China’s Global Activism: Strategy, Drivers and Tools*. (Washington, D.C. National Defense University Press, 2006), 9

<sup>114</sup> Charles Hawkins and Robert R. Love., ed., 103

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 23

million and Tajikistan \$5 million in low interest loans to purchase commercial goods<sup>116</sup>.

Economic aid is not restricted to just purchasing commercial goods but energy development projects as well. When US-Uzbekistan relations deteriorated, China stepped in by providing a low interest loan for energy development—that will benefit China’s energy policy. China’s foreign aid to its Central Asian neighbors unlike the US and other western nations does not include pre-conditions—such as human rights and economic reforms—which is consistent with their non interference belief under the *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*<sup>117</sup>.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) remains the keystone of China economic strategy in obtaining energy resources and transportation routes from Central Asia into China—via Xinjiang. Beginning with its investment into Kazakhstan’s oil pipeline development in the mid 1990—with an estimate \$400 million—to their current energy relations with Uzbekistan, China has maintained a presence in energy development within Central Asia in order to meet its ambition of establishing energy transportation routes to the Pacific Rim. China’s FDI in transportation—railways and roads—among its smaller border states support their economic strategy to provide adequate access into Xinjiang for business and trade.

## Strategic Advantage

Both China and the US economic strategies focus on stability in the region and energy development. However, the significant difference between the US and China lies within their foreign aid—that includes FSA funds—to Central Asian states. The US policy of active reforms in order to receive economic aid has hindered relations with most of the Central Asian states—with the extreme being Uzbekistan. China’s non-interference policy in state affairs has allowed them to gain an advantage in creating more stable relations with their neighbors. Xinjiang as a

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<sup>116</sup> Niklas Swanstrom. “China and Central Asia: a new Great Game or traditional vassal relations”, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2005, 12(45),579

<sup>117</sup> Philip C. Saunders. 12

center for trade and business, ethnic relations as well as their relative closeness to the region has given China a strategic economic advantage over the US in Central Asia.

## **Diplomatic Analysis**

Diplomatic strategy for the US has been to promote democracy and free market trade in Central Asia. NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) enabled the US to establish bilateral military-to-military cooperation with Central Asian states right after independence leading to the development of its foreign policy. After 9/11, security utilizing political and democratic reforms—from FSA funds—became an important factor of Central Asian foreign policy. Bilateral relations hinged on creating stable relations with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan—other Central Asian states as well, but focused primarily on the two major power—in the early 1990's as a means to promote its foreign policy. The “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 marked a change in US bilateral relations in the region. Central Asian leaders did not view the US as a reliable partner—for international support of established governments—to confront hostile political succession within established governments<sup>118</sup>. A counterbalance to this perceived US influence allowed China—thru the Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO)—to become closer to Central Asian states that eventually led to US military forces being expelled from Uzbekistan later that year. Kazakhstan's reaction to US pressure has Kyrgyzstan balancing its relations carefully between its multilateral partners as well as the US. With no other means of maintaining influence in the region, US bilateral diplomatic strategy is limited and at times strained due to its inability to influence other regional powers to meet US goals.

China's development of its “grand strategy” over the last 20 years has become an efficient means of maintaining its interest in Central Asia—energy and trade. Based off “*The Five Principles of Peace Coexistence*” developed in the 1950's, China established diplomatic

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<sup>118</sup> Eugene Rummer. *The US Interests and Role in Central Asia after K2*, The Washington Quarterly, (Summer 2006), pp. 149

relations with all the Central Asian states after their independence in 1991—focused on border security and economic trade. Building upon the success of bilateral relations has allowed China to evolve their multilateral strategy from the Shanghai Five—focused on regional border security and Islamic terrorism—to the Shanghai Cooperative Organization in 2001. Both of these diplomatic strategies allow China to balance the advantages and disadvantages of each to meet their strategic goals. China will typically use bilateral diplomacy on weaker or smaller members of a regional organization—such as the SCO—to persuade them to support an initiative or proposal within multiple setting<sup>119</sup>. A combination of the “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan and Andijon riots in Uzbekistan allowed China to leverage their bilateral relations with the other member states of the SCO. This advantage within the SCO led to a July 2005 appeal to the US on its intentions and timetable to withdraw military forces from Central Asia that supported China’s overall strategic goal of removing US influence from the region<sup>120</sup>.

## Strategic Advantage

China’s view of a multipolar world without US hegemony has allowed them to develop a diplomatic “grand strategy” in Central Asia that excludes the US. Both China and the US view diplomatic relations with Central Asian states as means to support their economic and security strategies. The key difference is that China utilizes a balanced diplomatic strategy—bilateral and multilateral—while the US is limited to just bilateral diplomacy. US realization of its declining diplomatic bilateral relations in Central Asia led to the US applying for observer membership within the SCO in 2005—which quickly denied by SCO members<sup>121</sup>. Yu Bin in a commentary for Foreign Policy in Focus stated, “The SCO remains the world’s only regional security

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<sup>119</sup> Phillip C. Saunders. 15

<sup>120</sup> Eugene Rummer. 150

<sup>121</sup> Ariel Cohen. 8

mechanism without direct US participation”<sup>122</sup>. His commentary supports the US diplomatic dilemma and provides support to China’s influence in Central Asia. China has the strategic advantage in diplomacy and will most likely maintain this advantage in the future.

## **Military Analysis**

US military strategy established the basis for diplomatic and economic cooperation in Central Asian states after their independence in 1991. NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) allowed US military cooperation to support Central Asian states against evolving terrorism threats—focused primarily in Uzbekistan anti-terrorism efforts against the IMU. Military aid to Central Asian states focused primarily on counter proliferation, border security and counter terrorism. A combination of military aid, PfP exercises and support of anti-terrorism efforts in Central Asia in the 1990’s allowed the US to build diplomatic trust within the region. After the events of 9/11, this trust allowed the US to establish military support bases within Central Asian for operations during OEF.

With increased US efforts in the region against terrorism, Central Asian leaders—especially Karimov in Uzbekistan—felt that US interests could balance China and Russia’s influence in the region. This relative balance between Central Asian states, US, China and Russia against regional terrorism became a hallmark of US military strategy until operations began in Iraq in 2003. This relative shift by the US into Iraq left a void in military and financial resources available for anti-terrorism efforts in Central Asia—excluding military operations in Afghanistan—has allowed China thru the SCO to take a leading role against regional terrorism<sup>123</sup>. As operations in Iraq continue, US military presence in Central Asia will remain low unless current conditions change in the near future.

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<sup>122</sup> Yu Bin. “Central Asia Between Competition and Cooperation”, 4 December 2006. *Foreign Policy in Focus Commentary*, accessed 13 January 2007, available at <http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/3754>, 2

<sup>123</sup> Charles Hawkins and Robert R. Love. ed., 107

China's military strategy in Central Asian has always focused on security of its western border—Xinjiang region—against the “three evils” of separatism, terrorism and extremism. Within the context of their grand strategy, China has utilized diplomatic and economic incentives to help Central Asian states develop military capability to defeat terrorism within their borders. China's bilateral security relations with each SCO states has benefited Kyrgyzstan which has received \$1.2 million worth of military equipment and Kazakhstan who has purchased military equipment valued at \$3 million<sup>124</sup>. China's increased influence in the SCO has allowed them to pursue its military strategy thru cooperation and initiatives. One of these initiatives includes the creation of the SCO Regional Antiterrorism Structure (RATS) in 2004. Created in response to declining US military and financial resources in the region, this organization—based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan—is responsible for coordinating SCO activities against the “three evils”<sup>125</sup>. Under the RATS, China has provided the framework for counter-terrorism training and border assistance for Central Asian states—which includes equipment sales or low interest loans for technology<sup>126</sup>. With decreased US military influence in the region since 2003, China has become the central supporter of regional security for Central Asian states.

### Strategic Advantage

China and the US are even militarily within Central Asia. Although the US presence is minimal in the region, its projection capability allows the US to maintain an increased presence if required—based off of current or future military operations in other parts of the world. China's military proximity to the region has allowed them to stabilize the region—with emphasis on Xinjiang—against the “three evils” by building capability (military and border security) within member states of the SCO.

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<sup>124</sup> Martha B Olcott. “The Great Powers in Central Asia”, *Current History*; Oct 2005, 335

<sup>125</sup> Charles Hawkins and Robert R. Love. ed., 121

<sup>126</sup> Phillip C. Saunders., 16

## Summary

Figure 5 demonstrates the complexities of foreign policies in Central Asia used by both China and the US. Within these complexities, China has established its “grand strategy” of linking multilateral and bilateral relations in order to achieve its regional policy—primarily focused on stability in the Xinjiang province. This grand strategy has allowed China to maintain a diplomatic and economic edge in the region as compared to the US foreign policy based on bilateral relations—a very limited interaction. In order for the US to gain influence in Central Asia, it would need to consider a different strategy to compensate for its lack of multilateral influence within the SCO. The final chapter of the monograph provides some considerations that the US should address to overcome its strategic weaknesses in Central Asia.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: Final Thoughts and Recommendations**

As shown in the previous chapter, the US is at a strategic disadvantage against China for influence in Central Asia—using the instruments of power. China ability to maximize its “grand strategy” has allowed them to surpass the US in maintaining and sustaining significant influence within Central Asia. Since 9/11, current US policy toward Central Asia has focused on supporting activities associated with the GWOT—such as military basing in neighboring countries to support OEF. Is it time for a change in US strategy within Central Asia? This monograph provides two recommendations that the US should consider in their current approach to Central Asia:

1. Re-evaluate current policy priorities within the Central Asia to match with current condition and;
2. Maximize relations with other states within multilateral organization that support US foreign policy priorities.

### **Re-evaluation of Policy Priorities**

Politics, energy and security have been the basis of US Central Asian foreign policy since state independence in 1991. However, policy priorities have changed twice since its inception. Political reforms (including economic), energy and security were the initial priorities of US policy in the 1990's in order to establish stability through economic development of energy resources. Security at this time focused on establishing military-to-military cooperation for border security and regional counter-terrorism activities that did not threaten US interest—even after the Taliban had taken control of Afghanistan and harbored Al-Qaeda within its borders. After 9/11, the policy toward Central Asia shifted which made security—against terrorism—the top priority followed by politics and energy development. Six years later, the policy priorities for Central Asia remain the same even after changes in the security situation. Two main events have an effect on why the US should consider a change in its policy priorities:



1. The SCO has taken a significant role on security issues in Central Asia with the establishment of the RATS and conduct of joint anti-terrorism exercises between member states.
2. NATO has expanded its operations beyond the Black Sea and has taken some responsibility of the military operations in Afghanistan thus reducing US military presence in the region—while the US increased its military presence in the Middle East.

These two events present an opportunity for the US to re-evaluate its policy priorities and adjust them to support their national goals in the region. It also provides a means to maximize US efforts by utilizing other organization—such as the SCO—to take responsibility for regional security.

A shift to the pre 9/11 Central Asian policy goals of politics, energy and security allows the US to focus on underlying political conditions within Central Asia that can lead to security problems. Some US experts refute that security—primarily against terrorism—is not the primary concern in the region and that the US should focus its efforts on social issues as a means to obtain significant change<sup>127</sup>. Addressing social issues such as poverty, drug trafficking, organized crime and the environment will allow the US to build confidence in the population. In order to accomplish this effort, the US officials must understand the cultural dimension of Central Asia. Clans and tribes—which are the primary source of power for Central Asian governments—operate outside of normal democratic processes which requires an understanding of these differences which requires increased educational or cultural exchanges with Central Asian states<sup>128</sup>.

## **Maximizing existing relations**

Bilateral relations with Central Asian states have constrained US policy in the region by focusing on individual states instead of the region as a whole. Non-entrance as an observer

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<sup>127</sup> Elizabeth Wishnick. “*Strategic Consequences of the Iraq War: US Security Interest in Central Asia Reassessed*”, (Thesis, Carlisle Barracks, P.A: US Army War College, 2004), 33

<sup>128</sup> Michael Rywkin., 23

member to the SCO has constrained US political capacity to influence change in the region—beyond terrorism and more toward political as well as economic change. The US needs to focus on maximizing its existing relationships through multilateral organizations—such as NATO—and individual SCO member/observer states that promote similar interests.

NATO has assumed a significant military role in Afghanistan since 2003 and classified Central Asia as a area of “special interest” in a June 2004 Istanbul Summit by establishing a permanent liaison officer in Kazakhstan<sup>129</sup>. With this increased interest in the region, the US could maximize NATO governments’ potential to engage the SCO on issues that favor US regional objectives—social-economic programs and democratic reforms just to name a few. Enhanced military-to-military engagement thru PfP—utilizing NATO government militaries—enhances the regional stability objectives of the SCO and serves as an additional venue for an NATO-SCO partnership. NATO’s experience in these types of programs—stemming from the operations in the Balkans—could be instrumental in developing a NATO-SCO dialogue allowing the US to influence Central Asia development through NATO.

Most of the SCO member/observer states have bilateral relations with the US. Enhancing some of these relationships could promote US interest in a multilateral setting. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are the two Central Asian states that have the closest relationship with the US while balancing their relations with China. The US should continue to foster these relationships thru continued economic aid that will facilitate state change while allowing them to promote these changes in a multilateral setting—to influence US policy objectives. India as an observer country shares similar interests the region as the US in countering terrorism, drug trafficking and

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<sup>129</sup> Weitz, Richard. “Reviewing Central Asian Partnerships”, *NATO Review*, (Autumn 2006), accessed 10 April 2007, available from <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2006/issue3/english/analysis2.html>

promoting democracy and regional stability<sup>130</sup> . The US should consider intensifying relationship with India that will allow them to influence Central Asia member states within the SCO.

In conclusion, this monograph has provided an insight on the complexities of Central Asian and its relations with both the US and China. Central Asian governments that developed from the former Soviet Union maintain a semi-authoritarian control of their respective states and depend heavily on their tribal/clan affiliations to maintain this control. Military-to-military cooperation allowed the US to establish a basis for its foreign policy within Central Asia. China's long history in the region has allowed them to develop and enhance their "grand strategy" by taking advantage of cultural ties—within the Xinjiang province—to Central Asia states. With this advantage, China has maintained economic and diplomatic supremacy of Central Asia over the US, which is limited to bilateral relations. However, the US can overcome this if it considers the recommendations provided in this monograph. The US and China competition for influence in Central Asia will continue as long as security and energy resources remain prominent in the world society.

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<sup>130</sup> Lal, Rollie. *Central Asia and Its Asian Neighbors: Security and Commerce at the Crossroads*, (Arlington, V.A: Rand Corporation, 2006), 34

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